

**MINUTES OF THE LOCAL JURISDICTION MEETING OF THE  
WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION  
September 25, 2002**

The special meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 10:30 a.m., on September 25, 2002, at the Institute for Extended Learning – Colville Center, 985 S. Elm Street, Colville, Washington.

Commissioners present were: Ed Barnes, A. Michèle Maher, and Connie Niva.

**ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT; AND FREIGHT MOBILITY  
IN NORTHEAST WASHINGTON**

Bob Anderson, Mayor of Colville, thanked the Commission for coming to Colville to meet with local officials and members of the public. He stated that Colville is at a strategic crossroads for transportation, consisting of US 395, SR 20, and other transportation corridors. Economic development for the area is tied to improved transportation facilities. He pointed out that US 395 should be a four-lane highway from Spokane to the Canadian border to allow freight to flow through the region and to support each community's industry.

Marty Wold, Executive Director, Tri County Economic Development Council, explained that the EDC is the lead agency for the Northeast Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization. He informed the Commission that Colville and Newport have both completed projects designed to revitalize their downtown cores, and that Chewelah and Kettle Falls have similar projects in the works. Many other cities in the northeastern portion of the state are developing projects to improve their streets and sidewalks, both to improve safety and the economic viability of the community. He explained that the communities see tourism as a business opportunity, but also as a way to promote the location of other businesses such as manufacturing, as business people are introduced to the benefits of the area through vacation trips. Mr. Wold discussed a proposal to locate a rest area and visitor center in Colville along US 395, which would help promote long-distance travel through the region and attract travelers to stop in the community. He suggested that partnerships with the Department to locate rest stops within small rural communities would reduce the cost of the facilities because of funding partnerships and operating efficiencies. Mr. Wold pointed out that the region is also working to promote industrial development, bringing in manufacturing facilities to replace the resource extraction industry that has declined. The transportation system needs to be improved to move raw materials to the plants, and finished products to market. He reminded the Commission that NAFTA traffic is still a significant additional burden on the highways in the region. Mr. Wold thanked the Commission and the Department for its cooperation and support in the projects that have been completed and that are under way.

Robin Pollard, Assistant Director, Office of Trade & Economic Development, discussed the various programs within her agency that assist the communities within the region in efforts to improve their economies. The Office has programs to promote tourism, to assist in marketing products, and a film office that promotes the use of Washington State settings for movies and television. The Office also administers the Community Economic Revitalization Board program and the Rural Economic Vitality Program that uses a portion of the TEA 21 funds to make transportation investments specifically to assist rural communities. She also referred to the agency's "industry cluster" study, which determined that businesses tend to cluster with similar or supporting businesses. The agency is assisting regions in pursuing appropriate industry clusters to build a sustainable economy, rather than simply pursuing individual businesses without a strategic outlook.

Senator Bob Morton discussed his concern that eight border crossings in eastern Washington require improvements to be able to handle the freight and passenger traffic. He pointed out that SR 25 picks up traffic from two highways, and recommended the state work with the federal government to determine which highway would be the primary crossing and receive the necessary improvements. He commented that the crossing near Curlew has heavy truck traffic, while the crossing at Oroville is the only crossing designated for the transport of livestock. The improvements need to be tailored to the use the border crossing receives. He also recommended the Commission invest in both highway and rail facilities, to help shift the freight traffic off the highways. Senator Morton also commented that US 395 should be improved, including a passing lane between Colville and Chewelah, to improve safety. Mr. Wold added to Senator Morton's comments by stating that the region needs more than one twenty-four hour border crossing, as the region misses tourism and other economic opportunities if freight or travelers have to travel too far away to cross the border. Vicki Strong, Stevens County Commissioner, pointed out that the road from the border crossing at Waneta to the town of Northport is a county road, and was not designed for heavy truck traffic. The road is restricted, narrow and winding, and the bridges along the route are not fit for truck traffic. She stated that the route should be improved. Don Dickey, Port Director, US Customs Service, commented that the Frontier-Patterson crossing is the only location under study for moving to a twenty-four hour service.

Mr. Wold pointed out that SR 31 also should be improved. Senator Morton explained that the mine located in Pend Oreille County is reopening, and will employ forty individuals. The opening and subsequent operation of the mine will require a great deal of truck traffic. He stated that improving SR 31 was a high priority for the region. Theresa Sanders, Economic Development Specialist with the EDC, explained that the communities within Pend Oreille County are working together to rebuild the economy and also the transportation system, and they rely on the Department of Transportation and the Office of Trade and Economic Development for expertise.

Senator Morton also raised the issue of the Keller Ferry, which should be replaced with a modern vessel with better capacity. He suggested that the users might be willing to pay a small fare, but pointed out that both Ferry County and Lincoln County don't have the revenue base to allow them to contribute to the replacement. He suggested that the federal government should be a partner in the venture, because of the tribal interest.

Secretary MacDonald commented that the Department doesn't have, and needs to have, a transportation policy for rural Washington. The Department should have a strategy in place for helping rural areas to develop their transportation facilities to support the needs of the communities.

### **STATEWIDE AND REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES**

Commissioner Maher provided an overview of transportation investment and revenue during the past decade and the implications for congestion, safety and pavement preservation. Keith Muggoch, Ferry County Engineer, pointed out that most of the transportation budget for Ferry County was from the state gas tax, because of the inadequate tax base of the County. Jim Whitbread, Stevens County Engineer, observed that the cost of complying with statewide standards raises the cost of investment, adding an additional burden on local governments trying to provide transportation facilities. Mr. Muggoch responded to a comment from Commissioner Barnes regarding the cost of a poor transportation system for the public, stating that roads that are in poor condition have a definite impact on the need for repair of automobiles. Commissioner Maher commented that there is a need to educate the public regarding the private cost of having roads and highways in poor repair, and the need for the entire state to support investment across the state.

Secretary MacDonald distributed a draft report regarding the Department's project investment record from 1991 to 2002. The report is intended to inform the public regarding what investments were made as a result of the 1990 gas tax increase, and what other investments have been made with the gas tax and other transportation revenues in general. He pointed out that only one third of the 1990 gas tax was provided to the Department of Transportation, due to revenue sharing with the cities and counties. Secretary MacDonald so refuted the argument, sometimes heard, that it costs three times as much to build highways in Washington as other states, pointing out specific examples of projects that have cost less to build in Washington; and also pointing out the differences in the investment programs and requirements of the states.

Mr. Wold asked whether the Department was developing an alternative investment plan for the possibility that Referendum 51 doesn't pass. Secretary MacDonald responded that the Department is thinking about contingencies in the event the Referendum does not pass, but no specific plan exists at this time.

Mr. Whitbread commented that local governments are investing only in preservation because of the lack of funding. He asked that the Commission and Department advocate continued funding for the preservation of county roads. Paula Hammond, WSDOT Chief of Staff, pointed out that the funding for the Transportation Improvement Board was originally intended to be invested in improvements at the local level, but in recent years has been used at the request of local jurisdictions to invest in state highway improvements.

Jerry Lenzi, Eastern Region Administrator, described a number of investments made during the past few years on US 395 to improve safety. He also discussed the Colville 2000 project, and pointed out that there are two phases remaining in that project. Mr. Lenzi also discussed the improvements that have been made on SR 20 and the critical improvement projects programmed under Referendum 51 for SR 31. The region has also installed cameras on Sherman Pass and at Loon Lake to better track weather conditions so the agency can more efficiently maintain the highways during the winter. Mr. Lenzi informed the Commission that the City of Chewelah is looking at projects similar to Colville to move freight traffic away from the city center and improve the main street. Mr. Lenzi explained what projects would be in the program with only a current law budget, and what would be in the program if Referendum 51 passed.

#### **AVIATION IN NORTHEAST WASHINGTON**

John Sibold, Director, WSDOT Aviation Division, stated that rural aviation is an important focus of the Division's new business plan. There are 90 rural airports in the state, 10 of which are in the NE region. Mr. Sibold pointed out that he was involved in economic development as the port director in Whatcom County, and found that one of the central issues for business location was whether there was an airport that could be used by company management to access the urban centers. A recent example for northeast Washington was a corporate executive who tried to fly to Colville to look at a site for business location and had to land in Spokane and then drive US 395 to Colville. His first question to the community was when would the runway in Colville be lengthened so he could land his jet in the community and avoid the drive. Mr. Sibold commented that as individuals locate in the rural areas, their need for access by air to the urban areas continues, especially for health care. That means rural areas need to pay attention to the aviation infrastructure. Rural airports also support fire-fighting and emergency response efforts. Mr. Sibold stated that rural airports have an important economic benefit to communities. In Colville alone, there are 10,000 landings for various purposes per year, and \$1 million in economic benefit. The Aviation Division is studying the impact of aviation on rural communities, and what investments need to be made in the airports. Aviation has about \$1 million a year to invest in pavement for 129 airports, which is not adequate. Fortunately, the FAA is gaining an understanding of the importance of rural airports, and has made \$8 million available for Washington for improving the existing rural airports.

Mr. Sibold commented that the new generation of small corporate aircraft that is being developed will be able to fly at 400 mph with 4 to 5 passengers, and is expected to cost less than \$1 million. The aircraft will be able to land in most weather conditions. The system of rural airports must be maintained to allow for the expansion of small corporate aircraft as a means of corporate travel.

Senator Morton introduced Jim Matthews, Jon Manton and Duane Scott. Mr. Manton described his work in developing a transportation plan for the Spokane Indian Tribe. The plan includes a proposal for planning for an airport on the reservation. The tribe has applied for an FAA airport improvement grant. Mr. Manton commented that the tribe has received a great deal of help from the FAA and the Department's Aviation Division. Environmental issues have limited the possible sites to one area, at the confluence of the Spokane and Columbia rivers. SR 25 will serve as a land link to the airport, and the proximity to the rivers will allow a water taxi link. Mr. Sibold confirmed that the Division is working with the FAA to make the airport possible. Mr. Matthews described the work being done to improve the airport in Colville. He pointed out that the location has limited the possibility of extending the runway. He stated that the Colville area needs a new airport location to serve the entire region. Mr. Scott described the struggle to obtain FAA approval for retrofitting and extending the runway. The difficulty in gaining approval led the City to invest in improvements to the existing facility without extending the runway. Mayor Anderson pointed out that the Growth Management Act and environmental regulations make it difficult to avoid conflicts with airport improvements. Clancy Bauman, Mayor of Chewelah, commented that the City of Chewelah has a very good airport to serve the community.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

Alan Frackenthall expressed his interest in having I-90 be an all-weather freeway with tunnels through the Cascade Range.

Pam Kelly, P.K. Consulting, and Crystal Richer, Creston City Clerk, presented a proposal for a rest area in the City of Creston. The rest area would be jointly sponsored by the City and by the Department of Transportation, would be maintained by the City, and would serve travelers along US 2.

Glen Clonnager presented a proposal for a rest area and interpretive center in the City of Othello along SR 17.

Rick Galloway, Kalispell Tribe, discussed the need for a bridge replacement near the town of Usk. It is a county bridge and will require an investment of \$17 million.

The Commission meeting adjourned at 3:45 p.m. on September 25, 2002.